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Military Commanders Shifted in Korea

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TOKYO, July 2 — A large-scale shift of military commanders has taken place in South Korea's armed forces, the first since President Roh Tae Woo took office in February.

Any changes in military posts come under close scrutiny in South Korea because of the powerful influence the military has exercised over political developments in the past. Because of the secrecy surrounding most military affairs in South Korea, however, it was not immediately clear what political effect the changes might have.

Some Koreans familiar with the reassignments — which became effective Friday but were not publicly announced — suggested that Mr. Roh instigated some of the promotions to consolidate his hold over the military, which includes many officers loyal to Chun Doo Hwan, Mr. Roh's predecessor. They pointed out that at least three two-star generals who had served under Mr. Roh when he commanded the army's Ninth Division were given strategic posts.

But two Westerners who also knew about the shifts said that Mr. Roh had been exercising far less political control over the military than any of his predecessors, and that he has not insisted upon approving individual promotions and retirements.

'We Don't See Anything Drastic'

"There are strong signs that Mr. Roh is decentralizing and democratizing the Government," said one Westerner knowledgeable about Korean politics. "He has enjoined his Cabinet officers to indeed run their ministries. As for military promotions, he has shown a strong wish that promotions be handled by promotions boards, and most don't have to go by the Blue House," the presidential residence.

One Westerner who monitors the South Korean military said the shifts probably reflected both the normal course of promotion and retirement in the military and the understandable desire of a leader to promote officers he knows and trusts. "I don't think you have to choose between either interpretation," he said. "We don't see anything drastic or alarming here."

Many of the reassignments involved two-star generals at the level of division commander, rather than the highest-ranking four-star generals. The allegiance of division commanders was critical when Mr. Chun, assisted by Mr. Roh, then a division commander himself, engineered a military coup in December 1979. It is not clear just how many officers were affected by Friday's reassignment, although reports indicate that dozens were involved, and one estimate ran as high as 80.

Mr. Roh has been come under severe criticism lately, both from the more liberal wing of his own party and from opposition politicians, for failing to push through political changes fast enough. Friday's reassignments might make Mr. Roh more confident of his ability to pick up the pace of change.

In the months since Mr. Chun stepped down, Koreans have been watching closely for signs that the former President is trying to build up a separate power base or mount a challenge to the new President.

Mr. Roh, who was a close ally of Mr. Chun and became his chosen successor, has sought to distance himself from his unpopular predecessor.

Even after Friday's reassignments, however, many of the officers Mr. Chun appointed remain in place. The Westerner who monitors the Korean military said he believed some of the rivalry between the two men had been exaggerated. "After all, they share a lot of the same supporters," he said.

party no longer has a majority.

The rejection of Chung Ki Sung was the first time in South Korea's 40-year constitutional history that a President's nomination of a chief justice has been turned down by the assembly.

Roh backers mustered 141 votes, seven votes short of a majority. There were 295 lawmakers present in the 299-member body. The opposition questioned Mr. Chung's background under past authoritarian governments.

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Top Judicial Nominee Rejected

SEOUL, South Korea, July 2 (AP) — The National Assembly today voted down President Roh's nominee for chief justice in the first test of power in the new legislature, where Mr. Roh's